

**MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST
DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY FORM**

NR Eligible: yes ☐ no ☒

Property Name: Eastern Avenue Underpass Inventory Number: B-5173
 Address: Eastern Avenue between S. Haven St. and S. Macon St. Historic district: yes ☒ no ☐
 City: Baltimore Zip Code: 21224 County: Baltimore City
 USGS Quadrangle(s): Baltimore East
 Property Owner: Mayor and City Council of Baltimore Tax Account ID Number: not available
 Tax Map Parcel Number(s): not avail. Tax Map Number: 26
 Project: Red Line Transit Study - Bayview Extension Agency: MTA
 Agency Prepared By: John Milner Associates, Inc.
 Preparer's Name: Katherine Farnham Date Prepared: 2/8/2010
 Documentation is presented in: See sources below.
 Preparer's Eligibility Recommendation: Eligibility recommended ☒ Eligibility not recommended ☐
 Criteria: A B C D Considerations: A B C D E F G
Complete if the property is a contributing or non-contributing resource to a NR district/property:
 Name of the District/Property: _____
 Inventory Number: _____ Eligible: yes Listed: yes
 Site visit by MHT Staff yes ☒ no ☐ Name: _____ Date: _____

Description of Property and Justification: *(Please attach map and photo)*

The Eastern Avenue Underpass, constructed in 1930, is a six-block below-ground bypass under one road bridge and three railroad bridges situated at grade. The underpass extends from Macon St. on the east to Haven St. on the west, curving to the north of the original east-west trajectory of Eastern Ave. The roadway within the underpass is four lanes wide with a concrete curb serving as the median.

The underpass has original pebbly concrete retaining walls on both sides along its full length. The walls increase in height as the road descends below grade. The walls were originally unpainted, but have since been painted on the inward-facing exposures. The exterior sides of the walls retain their original surfaces. The walls are topped with a mock balustrade, including slight projecting piers and a line of narrow vertical recessed panels simulating balusters. The west end of the north wall spirals into a curl at the end. The east and west ends of the north wall each have a bronze plaque with the following information: "City of Baltimore Department of Public Works; Bureau of Highways; William F. Broening, Mayor; Charles F. Goob, Chief Engineer; Nathan L. Smith, Highway Engineer; Catalano and Specora Construction Co., Contractor; The J.E Greiner Co., Consulting Engineers. 1930."

Sidewalks run along each side wall, and both are elevated a short distance above the traffic lanes. The north sidewalk is wider than

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MHT Comments:

Jim Faulkner
 Reviewer, Office of Preservation Services

3/25/10
 Date

[Signature]
 Reviewer, National Register Program

4/5/10
 Date

The south sidewalk and may have been altered at a later point. The narrow sidewalk structure on the south wall appears to be original and has inset rectangular panels along its base. Each sidewalk has a modern metal balustrade along its length. Post holes for earlier railings are still visible. Each of the four steel-plate girder bridges spanning the underpass has flat concrete buttresses. A flight of steps is inset in the north wall, parallel to the roadway, at the south tip of Kresson St., and a perpendicular flight of original concrete steps provides access from the original Eastern Ave. east of Janney St. to the sidewalk along the south wall. An archway is cut into the north wall between the two eastern bridges.

The Eastern Avenue Underpass was constructed by the city in 1930 to eliminate Pennsylvania Railroad grade crossings on Eastern Ave. at Iris St. and Kresson St. It was one of several government-funded public works projects constructed in the Baltimore area during the Great Depression of the 1930s. Multiple blocks of housing and commercial establishments on the north side of Eastern Ave. were torn down to make way for the new underpass. Provision was made for both streetcars and automobiles to use the underpass. A bridge was built to carry Janney St. across the sunken roadway, and access ramps to Janney St. were built from the center lanes of the underpass. The project cost approximately \$490,000, with \$150,000 contributed by the Pennsylvania Railroad. It is unclear which government agency provided the rest of the funding, but the city appears to have directed the work. It should be noted that the 1930 construction date predates the 1932 election of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the institution of the New Deal, so it is not an example of work performed under the WPA or other New Deal federal programs. A note in the clippings file at the Enoch Pratt Free Library's Maryland Room indicates that two youths were arrested in 1942 for stealing bronze plaques off bridges and the brass treads from the steps leading down to the Eastern Avenue underpass.

In 1958, the underpass underwent a \$200,000 renovation, which removed the original Janney St. bridge and its access ramps, and then reconstructed the bridge. The original ramp setup was deemed dangerous for motorists, and frequent traffic backups occurred. The removal of the ramps permitted two full lanes in each direction.

The Eastern Avenue Underpass is an example of an early 1930s public works road improvement that was part of a nationwide trend toward recognizing and eliminating perilous at-grade railroad crossings on American streets. With automobiles proliferating and road traffic assuming greater importance, railroad grade crossings were becoming more dangerous and caused frequent traffic backups as cars waited for trains to pass by. Highway bureaus nationwide began working to eliminate grade crossings through bridging and tunneling, and this effort has continued into modern times. The design chosen for this underpass also allowed Eastern Ave. traffic to bypass the busy Crown Cork & Seal complex, which subsequently constructed a new building above the original Eastern Ave. right-of way. While the underpass resulted in major improvements in roadway traffic flow on Eastern Avenue, the demolitions and displacements caused by its construction resulted in severe and lasting impacts on the commercial corridor through the Highlandtown and Greektown neighborhoods. Today, the underpass continues in use largely as designed, and remains an important and functional bypass within the busy Eastern Ave. commercial corridor.

The integrity of the Eastern Avenue Underpass has been eroded by alterations over the years. While its integrity of location and setting are largely intact, the other five aspects of integrity (design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association) are somewhat compromised. Changes impacting the integrity of the underpass include: the removal and reconstruction of the Janney St. overpass and ramps, alterations to the median strip and north sidewalk, replacement of sidewalk balustrades on both sides of the street, and the colorful but historically incompatible paint treatment of both the underpass and the four iron girder bridges spanning it. While the overall original design remains largely intact, and several character-defining qualities of a 1930s-era work of engineering are still evident, the many changes prevent the underpass from being a notable example of its type.

The underpass is recognizably a public works project of the 1930s, and reflects the often-drastic changes to cityscapes caused by rerouting traffic below ground to avoid railroads, intersections, or other impediments at grade. This type of work occurred nationwide, and the Eastern Avenue Underpass reflects this trend. However, it is one of many examples of this type of roadwork

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Eligibility recommended _____

Eligibility not recommended _____

Criteria: ___ A ___ B ___ C ___ D Considerations: ___ A ___ B ___ C ___ D ___ E ___ F ___ G

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Date_____
Reviewer, National Register Program_____
Date

nd does not appear to have played a notable role in this trend. On a local level, it was one of many improvements made around the city. As such, it does not appear to meet the requirements of National Register Criterion A. The underpass is not known to be associated with the lives or work of significant persons, and does not meet the requirements of National Register Criterion B. The Eastern Avenue Underpass is an example of an important type of roadway engineering and the use of poured concrete in such work, but it is one of many such examples nationwide. Although it possesses characteristics of this period of highway design, it is not the work of a master and lacks distinctive elements that would elevate it to a significant example of its type. Its loss of integrity means that it does not embody the characteristics of its construction period. As such, it does not appear to meet National Register Criterion C. The underpass was not evaluated for eligibility under National Register Criterion D during the historic architecture survey. Given the fact that it does not possess the integrity or significance to meet needed criteria, the Eastern Avenue Underpass is recommended not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

Sources:

Broening, Mayor William F. Radio address, printed in Municipal Journal (January 16, 1931) as The Progress of Greater Baltimore series.

Helton, Gary. Images of America: Highlandtown. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2006.

P.A.C. Spero & Company. Historic Highway Bridges in Maryland: 1631-1960. Prepared for Maryland State Highway Administration, 1995.

Smith, Sheldon. "14 Bridges Underway or Planned." Evening Sun, July 2, 1928.

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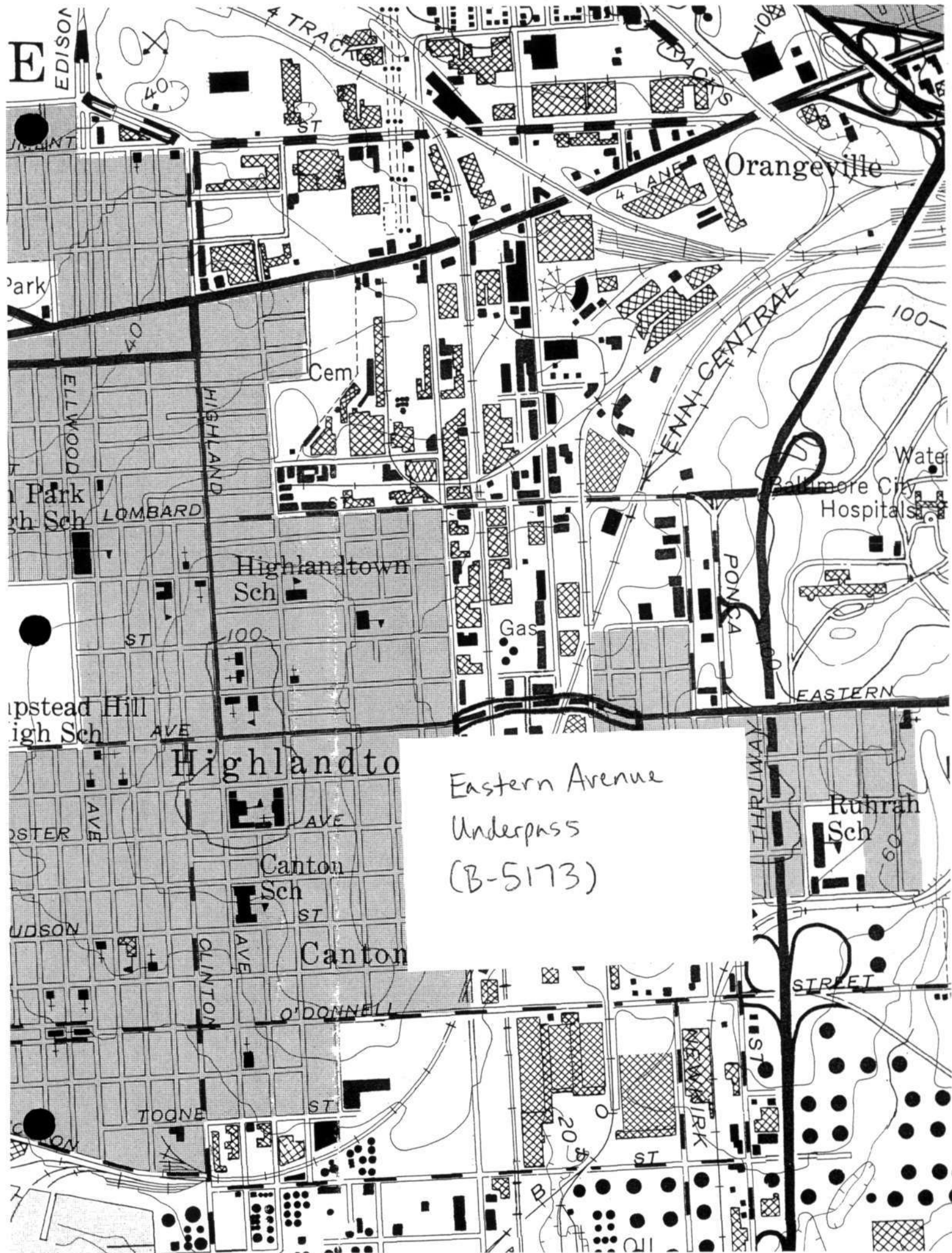
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B-5173

Eastern Avenue Underpass

Baltimore City, MD

S. Traum

July 2008

MD SHPO

Detail of west end of balustrade, view to SE

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Eastern Ave. Underpass

Baltimore City, MD

S. Traum

July 2008

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View of west sector of underpass, looking E from Haven St

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Eastern Ave. Underpass

Baltimore City, MD

S. Traum

July 2008

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View to E near Union RR overpass, north sidewalk

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Eastern Ave Underpass

Baltimore City, MD

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MD SHPD

View to NE from South sidewalk, near Union RR bridge

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Eastern Avenue Underpass

Baltimore City, MD

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View to W from north sidewalk near PW of B bridge

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Eastern Avenue Underpass

Baltimore City, MD

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July 2008

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View to SW from north sidewalk, near PW at B bridge

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B-5173

Eastern Avenue Underpass

Baltimore City, MD

S Traum

July 2008

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View to W from east end of overpass at Macon St.

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KALIOPE'S
RESTAURANT

NEW YORK STATE
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS
BUREAU OF HIGHWAYS

EASTERN AVENUE UNDERPASS

WILLIAM T. LADD, JR., DESIGNER
NATHAN L. LADD, JR., CIVIL ENGINEER
NATHAN L. LADD, JR., CIVIL ENGINEER
NATHAN L. LADD, JR., CIVIL ENGINEER
NATHAN L. LADD, JR., CIVIL ENGINEER
NATHAN L. LADD, JR., CIVIL ENGINEER

1952

B-5173

Eastern Avenue Underpass

Baltimore City, MD

S. Traum

July 2008

MD SHPO

Detail of plaque at E end of underpass, view to N

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B-5173

Eastern Avenue Underpass

Baltimore City, MD

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Detail of unpainted original balustrade at E end

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